



Cocktails and Camaraderie

Suneeta Sodhi Kanga goes on a girls' night out in Mumbai and echoes Cyndi Lauper's legendary line, "When the working day is done, oh, girls, they wanna have fun"

FRENZIED schedules can leave nerves frayed and friendships suffering for single and married women alike but you know you can always count on your girlfriends. A Girl's Night Out is the chance to ditch the to do list and let your hair down. Recently my girly troupe put together our usual package of warmth, smiles, girly giggles and topped it with uber confidence to go prowling around the city's varied night clubs. We promised ourselves a strictly 'liquid diet' ...well, at least for starters! A few laughs, a couple of cocktails, some good starters thrown in ... for a lot of women, that's all they need to reconnect!

There's no dearth of nightlife hotspots in Mumbai for girls who just want to have fun but to make it easy for you, here is a list of the top three bars/lounges that my girlfriends and I enjoyed.

The **Canvas Lounge Bar, Palladium, High Street Phoenix** is a chic, split-level space that has been converted into an opulent lounge accessorised with red velvet curtains, dark couches and red strobe lights. This sprawling space is spread over two levels with a stunning, high ceiling baroque look. With the Restaurant, the Lounge Bar, the Terrace Grill, Smoking Room and the luxurious Powder Room for Ladies it is almost like a Ladies Only lounge. The DJ console, besides possessing cutting-edge sounds, creates a mesmerising play of visuals and lights on the four large screens, while allowing guests to enjoy their conversation and drinks. The talented bartenders rustled up amazingly sinful and unusual cocktails which came from the portfolio of Aspri Spirits. According to Sumedh Singh Mandla,

CEO, Aspri Spirits Pvt Ltd, "A pretty large chunk of our portfolio is dedicated to women consumers. Women are getting more open and confident about their choices. They are no longer sticking to just wines or gin and tonic. They are clear about what they want, their tastes, likes and dislikes and are willing to experiment. Very soon, they will have a substantial share of the consumption numbers."

While spoiling us with an assortment of delicious offerings like corn and spinach phyllo rolls, artichoke and sundried tomato bruchettas and paneer satays; Sumit Deewan, Assistant Restaurant Manager, Canvas, tells us that women these days are ready to experiment beyond the traditional Cosmopolitan and Singapore Sling cocktails. Fresh fruit and flavoured spirit cocktails are preferred by the ladies these days.

Few places are more romantic than a rooftop sky bar overlooking the sea and the twinkling lights of the city below. **The Dome** was our next destination. Located on the Intercontinental Marine Drive's 11th floor, it captured our mood of uber confidence, panache and oomph with an informal, open-air lounge and terrace restaurant. In the midst of all this glamour, the InterContinental Marine Drive commands a sweeping view of the Arabian Sea.

Voted Mumbai's Most Romantic Restaurant in the year 2005-2006, Dome serves grilled delights from the open kitchen on the terrace. From this open-air lounge, guests can take in spectacular sunsets and views of the Marine Drive promenade.



According to Sandeep Radhakrishnan, Food & Beverage Manager, Inter Continental Marine Drive, "We often have groups of women ranging from ages 21 to 40 coming and enjoying themselves with shots and cocktails and champagnes." While happily munching on the delicious asparagus tempura sushi and ebi tempura rolls, we agreed wholeheartedly that even though there are a number of fine dining options at the elegant hotel, the al fresco rooftop venue stands out for its unbelievably dreamy ambience.

For some women, a true girls' night out requires letting their hair down and kicking their heels up. So to continue our celebration of the spirit of womanhood in this dear, old, dirty, smelly, lovable city we hit the roads in search of the next bar that would dish up the last but, not the least, of heavenly cocktails coupled with some dancing.

Converted from an old mill, **Shiro** feels larger than life compared with the rest of Mumbai's low ceiling bars. With gigantic stone statues leading

into a 4,000 square foot area of glowing lanterns with lush bamboo thickets and soothing pools of water, Shiro would seem like the last place to go crazy in Mumbai. But this popular pan-Asian restaurant/bar is home to retro-themed Friday nights, when the high-ceilinged lounge is so crowded you need to balance your drink on your head and stand on one foot to hold your space (ok not quite, but you get the picture!). It is full-on nostalgia as Mumbai sings along to 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s tunes (everything from Funkytown to ABBA and Kylie Minogue) accompanied by Shiro's cheese rolls and other specialities.

In the wee hours of the night, exhausted but cheerful, my girlfriends — Ruchi Sankhe, Ruchi Tandon, Bubun Data Mitra, Sunaina Rochwani

Bhagwat and Rachana Minocha Lucknowala – and I, head back to our respective homes with a host of happy memories.

We are especially appreciative of the fact that Mumbai allows a woman enough space to breathe without her having to check her surroundings for pollutants marring her safety.

Whether your goal is to unwind, nosh, sip cocktails, socialise or dance, everyone can enjoy the hot spots of this city. It doesn't matter what you're doing — when the girls are all together, it's sure to be a good time... and age doesn't matter!

Tip: Heels are so much sexier than flats, but your feet will kill you after dancing the night away. Pack your fit flops in your car for quick relief. ☒

A chat with Carlton Royle, General Manager, Shiro, Mumbai

Suneeta: What are the trends in cocktail drinking among women these days?

Carlton: Compared to the earlier years, now our patrons and cocktail connoisseurs are looking for drinks made by knowledgeable bartenders and mixologists — otherwise known as spirit professionals. The current trend for the adventurous woman is a wide assortment of specialty cocktails. In fact, women often are the first to order creative cocktails, which is at the forefront of the cocktail craft movement. The 35 plus female demographic demands cocktails with fresher ingredients and artisanal spirits. The trend among women is for fresh fruit infusions in modern craft cocktails.

Suneeta: Does Shiro have a special ladies' night?

Carlton: As of now, we don't have a ladies' night at Shiro. However, this is something we are thinking of introducing. We are planning a night, dedicated to pampering our female patrons and ensuring they get fantastic cocktails on the house.

Suneeta: What is the age group of the ladies that party at Shiro?

Carlton: Shiro has a patronage which is vibrant and wide in its age demographic. The female patrons are between the age of 25 to 60 years.



COCKTAILS SERVED AT CANVAS

Café Royal

1 1/2 oz Patron XO Café Tequila
Strong brewed coffee
Freshly whipped cream
Cocoa powder

In a heated coffee mug add Patrón XO Café. Fill to within 1 inch with coffee. Top with freshly whipped cream. Dust with cocoa powder.

Japanese Slipper

30ml Midori Liqueur
30ml Triple Sec
30ml fresh lemon juice

Fill shaker with ice. Add ingredients. Shake and strain into a Martini glass.

Garnish with a cherry (optional).



COCKTAILS SERVED AT SHIRO

Shanghai Sunset

Vodka 30ml
Tequila 30ml
Green melon juice 10 ml
Fresh pineapple juice 150 ml
Cranberry juice 60 ml

Put all ingredients except the cranberry juice in a mixing glass with loads of ice. Shake it and pour into a hurricane glass and top it with the cranberry juice.

Velvet Kimono

Vodka 60 ml
Lime juice 5 ml
Watermelon chunks 7-8 nos.
Watermelon extract 10 ml

Muddle water melon chunks in a mixing glass. Add add lime juice and water melon extracts along with vodka over a lot of ice. Shake it well and double strain into a martini glass to make a perfect velvet kimono.

Diabolic

50 ml Cointreau,
30 ml cranberry juice
20 ml lemon juice
10 ml strawberry puree
2 drops of Tabasco

Mix all the ingredients. Shake well and double strain into a martini glass. Decorate with a couple of chili peppers